

# Appendix E

Public Comment in Response to November 10 Letter from  
the LBC and DEED

Oct-13-2003 02:08pm From=ASSOC ALASKA SCHOOL BOARDS

+807 586 2005

T-821 P.002/002 F-860

**Alaska Association of School Administrators**

**Resolution # 11**

**Opposing Mandated School Consolidation**

Originated by: Klawock City School District for the Alaska Association of School Administrators at the Fall Meeting in Girdwood, Alaska, October 5, 2003.

**WHEREAS**, mandated school<sup>Dist</sup> consolidation would significantly reduce local control in many school districts in Alaska, and

**WHEREAS**, studies fail to demonstrate improved academic performances in consolidated school districts, and

**WHEREAS**, the Alaska Legislative Budget and Audit Committee studies suggested only minor savings by consolidating school districts, and

**WHEREAS**, a similar student conducted by the State of Washington Legislative and Budget Committee suggests there are significantly better ways to cut costs, and

**WHEREAS**, the AASA encourages and supports cooperative and school service opportunities to reduce costs, now

**THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED** that the Alaska Association of School Administrators opposes any legislative effort that would mandate school district consolidation.

Adopted: Girdwood, October 5, 2003

*Sampson -*

- ① Political motivation
- ② Cost Savings to the State
- ③ improved instruction

*Approved.*

**PROPOSED**





## Klawock City School District

P.O. Box 9 Klawock, Alaska 99925 907-755-2220 Fax: 907-755-2913

Richard E. Carlson  
Superintendent

Donald H. Busse  
K-12 Principal

October 20, 2003

Director  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West 7<sup>th</sup> Ave Suite 1770  
Anchorage, AK 99501-3510

Enclosed please find a resolution adopted by the Klawock City School District Board of Education opposing mandated school district consolidation. The Klawock Board of Education strongly believes in the principle of local control and finds no compelling research that supports consolidation. Research fails to demonstrate that consolidation improves academic performance or generates significant cost savings. The only guaranteed result of consolidation is to distance citizens from the governance of their local school. Therefore, the Klawock City School District Board of Education is asking your support in opposing mandated school consolidation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard E. Carlson".

Richard E. Carlson  
Superintendent

MEETING TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES TODAY  
[klawock.k12.ak.us](http://klawock.k12.ak.us)

# **KLAWOCK CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION**

## **Resolution 2003-3**

### **Opposing Mandated School District Consolidation**

Originated by: Klawock City School District

**WHEREAS** mandated school district consolidation would significantly reduce local control in many school districts in Alaska, and

**WHEREAS** studies fail to demonstrate improved academic performance in consolidated school districts, and

**WHEREAS** the Alaska Legislative Budget and Audit Committee studies suggested only minor savings by consolidating school districts, and

**WHEREAS** a similar study conducted by the State of Washington Legislative and Budget Committee suggests there are significantly better ways to cut costs, and

**WHEREAS** the AASA encourages and supports cooperative and school service opportunities to reduce costs,

**THEREFORE IT IS RESOLVED** that the Alaska Association of School Administrators opposes any legislative effort that would mandate school district consolidation.

Adopted: October 16, 2003

RE: Klukwan School

**Subject: RE: Klukwan School**

**Date:** Mon, 24 Nov 2003 13:59:11 -0900

**From:** Cheryl Stickler <cstickler@chathamssd.org>

**To:** Dan Bockhorst <dan\_bockhorst@dced.state.ak.us>

**CC:** "Connie A. Newman" <cnewman@chathamssd.org>

The student capacity of our building is estimated to be around 50 students. If more concrete numbers are necessary, I'll need to contact the architects who designed the building. At one time in the 80s, there were 52-55 students enrolled in Klukwan, and they were forced to utilize storage rooms and offices for classroom space.

It is fine with me to include my letter in the record. Our legislators need to understand that there is more to consider than mere dollars when addressing our Alaskan children's education needs.

Lastly, it may be an oversight, but I didn't see an attached letter. (?) I appreciate the opportunity to subscribe to the Boundary Commission list.

Thank you for sharing information with us.

Cheryl

> -----  
> From: Dan Bockhorst  
> Sent: Monday, November 24, 2003 12:21 PM  
> To: Cheryl Stickler  
> Cc: Connie A. Newman  
> Subject: Re: Klukwan School  
>  
> Ms. Strickler: Thanks for your prompt and thoughtful response. There was one other question that I neglected to ask. Would you please tell me the capacity of the Klukwan School in terms of enrollment (i.e., how many student will the building accommodate)?  
>  
> I understand the desire on the part of local residents to have input on any decision that might affect their schools. At this point, there are no specific proposals for consolidation of any schools, including the one at Klukwan. The legislative directive for the review of school consolidation issues was outlined in the letter that I sent to you this morning. To provide you with further information regarding the matter, I am attaching a letter from the Chair of the Local Boundary Commission and the Commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Development. That letter is addressed to the Executive Director of the Alaska Municipal League, but similar letters were sent to all school district superintendents and presiding officers of  
> school boards in Alaska.  
>  
> As further information and materials are developed regarding this matter, it will be made available to the public. One way to keep informed about this matter is to subscribe to the Local Boundary Commission's public notice service. There is no charge for the service. You may subscribe at  
>  
> [http://list.state.ak.us/guest/RemoteListSummary/DCED\\_LocalBoundaryCommissionlist](http://list.state.ak.us/guest/RemoteListSummary/DCED_LocalBoundaryCommissionlist)  
>  
> Thanks again for your comments. As you will note from the attached letter, the Chair of the Commission and the Commissioner of the Department of Education and Early Developing are inviting comments for the record regarding consolidation. Please advise me if you would like me to include your earlier e-mail in the record?  
>  
>  
>  
> Cheryl Stickler wrote:  
>

RE: Klukwan School

> > Dear Mr. Bockhorst,  
> > I'm sorry I missed your call Friday afternoon. I'm usually available in the  
office during the afternoons (I teach a.m. classes), but was in meetings the day you  
called.  
> >  
> > Debra was absolutely right about email. It's the best.  
> >  
> > The Klukwan School was built in 1985 and our current enrollment is 40 students.  
We serve pre-school students 3 days/wk, and on those days we have 42 students. Of  
the 40 students, 29 live in the Haines Borough and 11 are from Klukwan. Of the 2  
pre school students, 1 lives in the Haines Borough and 1 lives in Klukwan. We have 4  
students on a waiting list for bus space (our bus holds 18 children) - hence the  
waiting list. The decision to purchase a bus was made after many parent requests for  
their children to have an opportunity to have an education that is culturally  
relevant.  
> >  
> > There are a few different reasons for the appeal of the Klukwan setting: 1) it  
is smaller and students receive individualized instruction; 2) the Tlingit  
language/culture program is integrated throughout our school day and helps us work  
toward our mission statement that supports local heritage language revitalization  
efforts; 3) some students do not find success in larger school settings, but thrive  
in a system that is small enough to meet the needs of each and every child; 4) due to  
the village's> reliance on traditional values and mores, students have an  
opportunity to work in an environment that reinforces respect for elders, respect for  
peers, and respect for the environment. Parents who send their children to this  
school appreciate that.  
> >  
> > Finally, not knowing how the process for this consolidation will progress, it is  
vital for you to be aware that community members must have input on the decision. If  
the State begins thinking about linking the Klukwan School with the Haines Borough  
School District, certain political issues need to be addressed. Klukwan is not part  
of the Haines Borough. It is a federally recognized tribe and its land is held in  
trust with the federal government. There is a strong political history between  
Klukwan and Haines that this consolidation effort may re-open.  
> >  
> > As for the Chatham School District and the Haines Borough School District, we  
have been educational partners for the families in our valley for many years. I feel  
we are building a communication bridge which allows us to work together for our  
communities' families. I appreciate working with our two districts' administrations  
and regard them highly.  
> >  
> > I would appreciate more information regarding this consolidation effort and the  
options that may be available for Klukwan School.  
> >  
> > Sincerely,  
> > Cheryl Stickler  
> >  
> > cc: Connie A. Newman, Superintendent, Chatham School District  
> > -----  
> > > From: Dan Bockhorst  
> > > Sent: Monday, November 24, 2003 6:31 AM  
> > > To: Cheryl Stickler  
> > > Subject: Klukwan School  
> > >  
> > > <<File: 110603 Senator Wilken -- intent.pdf>>  
> > > Ms. Stickler: I serve as staff to the Alaska Local Boundary  
> > > Commission. The 2003 Alaska Legislature directed the Local Boundary  
> > > Commission and the Department of Education and Early Development to  
> > > address issues relating to school consolidation. Attached is a copy of  
> > > a letter from State Senator Gary Wilken dated November 6, 2003,  
> > > outlining details of the legislative directive.  
> > >  
> > > I have spoken with Debra Schnabel about the matter. She suggested that

RE: Klukwan School

> > > I also speak to you. I tried calling you on Friday, but you were  
> > > unavailable. Debra suggested that I try contacting you by fax or  
> > > e-mail. I would appreciate it if you would answer the following  
> > > questions:  
> > >  
> > > When was the current Klukwan School built?  
> > > What is the current enrollment at the Klukwan School?  
> > > How many of the students currently enrolled at the Klukwan School live  
> > > in the Haines Borough?  
> > > How many students are currently on the waiting list to attend the>  
> > > Klukwan School.  
> > > Of those on the waiting list, how many are residents of the Haines  
> > > Borough?  
> > > To what do you attribute the popularity of the Klukwan School?  
> > >  
> > >  
> > >  
> > >  
> > >  
> > >  
>  
>  
>







## THE LAKE AND PENINSULA SCHOOL DISTRICT

101 Jensen Drive  
P.O. Box 498  
King Salmon, Alaska 99613  
Phone (907) 246-4280 / Fax (907) 246-4473



November 25, 2003

By FAX: (907)269-4539

Roger Sampson, Commissioner  
Alaska Department of Education & Early Development  
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3510

Dear Commissioner Sampson and Chair Hargraves:

I am writing in response to your letter requesting my opinion on school consolidation. While I appreciate the motivation of school consolidation to increase the efficiency of operations, I believe that school consolidation will not automatically lead to a higher level of student achievement or, in the long run, be more fiscally responsible. As is always the case with education, we must do what is right for our students; therefore I approach the topic of school consolidation with caution. Here are my views on the two points raised in your letter.

In regard to the administration of a district, I think it is a mistake to presume that combining two administrations will make operations more efficient. In particular, school consolidation that would include multi-sites, diverse cultural rural districts is counter-productive. In my district, it is a daily challenge for our administration to meet the students' needs at our fourteen schools since the distance between sites is great (no roads, only travel by small plane) and the cultural make-up is wide-ranging. I believe that increasing the size of my district would reduce efficiency, decrease productivity, diminish staff and student morale resulting in overall hindrance in providing education.

I recognize that the consolidation of administrations of two single site districts that are in proximity on a map may appear feasible and doable. However, I am apprehensive in making a recommendation that such consolidations occur without taking into account and allowing for the many seen and unseen variables (including cultural) of the two sites. I don't believe there is a "one size fits all" way to approach combining districts and administrations; it must be carefully considered on a case by case basis.

Chignik Bay • Chignik Lagoon • Chignik Lake • Egegik • Igiugig • Ivanof Bay • Kokhanok • Levelock  
Newhalen • Nondalton • Pedro Bay • Perryville • Pilot Point • Port Alsworth • Port Heiden

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OFFICE

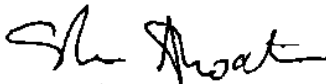
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November 25, 2003  
Roger Sampson, Commissioner  
Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Page 2

If some form of school consolidation is mandated by the legislature, then Senator Wilken's second option, consolidation of school functions, should be explored as a way to reduce operating costs. Again, it is imperative that such a study includes the pending and long-range effects on student educational achievement. I know that all organizations strive to improve the efficiency of their operations and if shared services indicate improvement, then it should be considered. However, if shared services cause a school district's delivery of education to be diluted to the point of regression, then it is a serious mistake to pursue this option as it defeats the very purpose of education.

Knowing the cost of education continues to rise, I agree that it is appropriate to examine ways to save money and be more resourceful. However, it is wrong and detrimental to the future of our State and all its citizens, to view monetary efficiency as the bottom-line. We are not in the business of making money; there are no financial profits for a school district. The profit that a school district realizes is the success of its students. Any effort that undermines this chance for success should not be considered.

Sincerely,



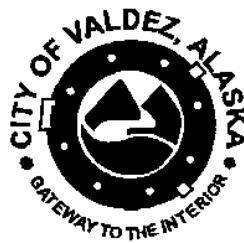
Steve Atwater  
Superintendent

cc: Jeff Currier, Lake and Peninsula Borough Manager

11-25-03 06:07pm From: City of Valdez

98353420

T-844 P.002/004 F-516



Office of the City Manager  
November 25, 2003

Mr. Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3510  
Fax (907) 269-4539

Mr. Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Department of Education & Early Development  
801 W. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894  
Fax: (907) 465-4156

Dear Mr. Hargraves and Sampson:

The City of Valdez has followed the issue of school district consolidations and its impact on the formation of boroughs. The City of Valdez is a home rule municipality that contributes over 50% of the funds necessary for operating the local school district. The district has nearly 870 enrolled students.

Recently, the City of Valdez passed Resolution 03-90, formally supporting Senate Concurrent Resolution 12, sponsored by Senator Wilkin, which called for the formation of boroughs in four regions of the state for the expressed purpose of having local residents contribute to local education where they can. A copy of Resolution 03-90 is enclosed for reference. The City has long supported the formation of boroughs in areas of the State where they can financially contribute to local school districts.

Although the City of Valdez is located in the unorganized borough, Valdez does contribute over 50% of the cost for local education and is relatively isolated which does not lend itself readily to combining Valdez with other jurisdictions in order to achieve economies of scale by combining school districts. In combining school districts for efficiencies one needs to look at the distances separating the current districts and the modes of the transportation between these locations.

The statement of legislative intent regarding SCR 12 outlines the primary purpose of school consolidation as "...providing effective and results-based intervention strategies to improve performance that will assist students to raise their achievement levels and meet high academic standards, especially in the core areas of reading, writing, and mathematics..." While the City understands and supports the desire of the state to have local communities and areas financial support education in their areas toward this goal, the City will not support efforts to combine the Valdez School District with other schools districts. The combination of Valdez with another district would only dilute the already declining tax revenue needed for local education. The end result for Valdez would mean a reduction in academic standards.

Thank you for your consideration of the City's comments.

Sincerely,  
  
David Dengel  
City Manager

P.O. BOX 307 • VALDEZ, ALASKA 99686  
TELEPHONE (907) 835-4313 • FAX (907) 835-2992



11-25-03 06:07pm From-City of Valdez

98353420

T-844 P 003/004 F-516

**CITY OF VALDEZ, ALASKA**

**RESOLUTION 03-90**

**A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VALDEZ ALASKA SUPPORTING SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 12 AND RECOMMENDING PASSAGE OF SCR 12**

WHEREAS, a significant portion of Alaskans reside within unincorporated areas, within the unorganized borough; and

WHEREAS, these areas of the state do not financially support their local public school systems; and

WHEREAS, residents living in organized boroughs, and home rule or first class cities within the unorganized borough are required to operate and fund their public school systems; and

WHEREAS, Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 acknowledges the natural unfairness in our current local government structure and offers a possible solution; and

WHEREAS, the Local Boundary Commission determined in its February 2003 report *Unorganized Areas of Alaska that Meet Borough Incorporation Standards*, that seven unorganized areas meet current standards for borough incorporation, including the necessary fiscal and administrative capacity to conduct borough functions; and

WHEREAS, while three of the model boroughs have cities that contribute at or above the required school match funding, four of these seven areas have a significant number of residents who are not required by the state to help operate or support their local schools; and

WHEREAS, all areas of Alaska should be required to contribute toward school operations and maintenance.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF VALDEZ ALASKA, that

The City Council of the City of Valdez, Alaska supports Senate Concurrent Resolution 12 insofar as it recommends borough formation for the Upper Tanana Basin, Copper River Basin, Glacier Bay and Chatham Region Model Boroughs for the purpose of area contributions toward school operations and maintenance.

11-25-03 06:08pm From=City of Valdez

98353420

T-844 P.004/004 F-516

Resolution 03-90  
Page 2

PASSED AND APPROVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF  
VALDEZ, ALASKA this 6<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2003.

CITY OF VALDEZ, ALASKA

  
Bert L. Cottle, Mayor

ATTEST:

  
Sheri L. Pierce, CMC, City Clerk





## CRAIG CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Ronald W. Erickson, Superintendent

P.O. Box 800  
Craig, AK 99921  
Phone 907-826-3274  
FAX 907-826-3322  
Camille Booth, Principal  
Doug Rhodes, Principal  
Bill Whicker, Principal

November 19, 2003

Mr. Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3510

RECEIVED  
NOV 19 2003  
Local Boundary Commission

Dear Mr. Hargraves,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the questions relating to school consolidation. Your first question regarding the best interests of the children and public compelling school consolidation is a difficult question to answer. I am sure you are aware that with rare exception there are no large scale savings with school consolidation. Studies have shown that over a period of 5-10 years after consolidation, costs to operate consolidated schools nearly equal what the costs would be to operate the schools had they not been consolidated. This was borne out in studies in New York State, Kansas, and Iowa which, back in the 1950's through the 1970's, underwent significant consolidation efforts. So the question of the public interest as it pertains to cost savings is probably not compelling. On the other hand, if the public interest is better served through enhanced educational opportunities and a greater portion of the dollars available being spent on instruction, it would appear that there could be a compelling argument made in some cases. For instance, very small high schools are not able to provide the breadth and depth of programming that a larger school could provide. Some classes can be provided in the small schools with the use of technology but the performing arts, and many vocational classes do not lend themselves to a distance education format. One might say that shifting substantial funding from central administration to classroom instruction through school district consolidation could provide more opportunities for students either in coursework or remediation of basic skills. This could constitute a compelling argument for both the public and the students. One of the biggest arguments against consolidation is of course the loss of local control as viewed by the communities involved. That is probably one of the most compelling reasons to NOT consolidate as the smaller communities will lose control of what happens to their schools. Unfortunately, this need for local control is many times in conflict with what is in the best interest of the students educationally although not necessarily culturally. The gap between educational opportunity and local control, particularly as it relates to cultures, is significant in Alaska.

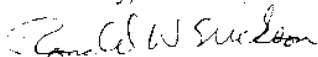


Aspects that I believe need to be considered before any consolidation plan is promoted or recommend include: reasonable geographic proximity of the schools; language/cultural similarities; school board representation (organization); funding changes/enhancements (incentives); potential cost savings (economies of scale, particularly in central administration); and of course a reasonable expectation that student learning will be improved. I believe there are several instances where by using these criteria, school consolidation could or in some cases should take place.

The second question related to options for school consolidation are well addressed by Senator Wilken. I think that the use of the third class borough is one option that is much more palatable by some regions than is the first, second or home rule borough. I do not think you should try to recommend actual individual school consolidation within established districts or between neighboring districts such as forcing the closure of one high school and sending all the students to the neighboring school district. I think the considerations need to be consolidation of school districts and then let the new district school board make the determination about individual school consolidations. One of the greatest fears is that communities will lose their schools if consolidated. That must be a local school board decision, not one made by either the Boundary Commission or the Legislature. School size is already an issue in that schools of less than 10 are not funded. They close because of the funding and that decision is made by the local school board.

In closing, I only hope that either the Boundary Commission or the Legislature does something definitive this year and gets us past the continual upheaval that these discussions generate. These issues are so divisive and take so much of a community and school's efforts to respond to, which drains time and resources from instruction which is already scarce. I keep hearing that "boroughization and/or school consolidation" is eventually going to happen, so let's get on with it if that is so.

Sincerely,



Ronald W. Erickson  
Superintendent of Schools  
Craig City School District

CC: Roger Sampson, Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

11/25/03 TUE 10:44 FAX

002

## Yupit School District

Box 51190 • Akiachak, AK 99551 • (907) 825-3600 • FAX (907) 825-3655



November 24, 2003

Mr. Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Dear Mr. Hargraves:

This letter is in response to your correspondence of November 10, concerning the directive (page 10, section I, chapter 83, SLA 2003) from the 2003 Alaska Legislature concerning school consolidation. While Yupit School District has well over the threshold number of 250 students in districts being looked at for possible consolidation, it is my understanding we are being considered on the basis of being one of the state's newer districts. I would like to express my disagreement with this action on several counts.

First I believe local control and autonomy when our children's education is involved is of the utmost importance. If the Yupit School District were to consolidate with another district, our people would no longer have the influence they now have upon their children's schooling. Instead of two or three representatives from each village on the Regional School Board, a village would be lucky to have one. When a move such as consolidation happens to our people instead of by them, through democratically held elections, there is a sense of loss and lack of ownership in the resulting organization.

Second, Yupit School District is one of the few districts in the state experiencing an increase in student population. Over the past 10 years, YSD has seen a 19% gain in student count, while statewide numbers have only seen a gain of 9%. In that same time period, our state funding for education has increased only 8%. In other words, in 1993, we were spending approximately \$10,630 per child. This year, we will have \$9,854, nearly \$1,000 less to educate each child. When inflation is factored in, it is very clear YSD has learned to do more with less, to live within our means, and to get the biggest return on each dollar possible.

**Henry Lott Memorial School**  
P.O. Box 115  
Tuluksak, AK 99679  
(907) 693-5625  
FAX (907) 895-5645

**Arlicaq School**  
P.O. Box 227  
Aklak, AK 99552  
(907) 765-4600  
FAX (907) 765-4642

**Akiachak Elementary School**  
P.O. Box 51190  
Akiachak, AK 99551  
(907) 825-3616  
FAX (907) 825-3656

**Moses Peter Memorial High School**  
P.O. Box 51190  
Akiachak, AK 99551  
(907) 825-3660  
FAX (907) 825-3690

11/25/03 TUE 10:44 FAX

003

Third, this whole discussion appears to be void of what should be our main goal: Increasing student achievement. I realize YSD is on district and school improvement lists. However, we are making great strides in improving education and student test scores. If we were to become part of a larger district, the attention to each individual child could not be at the level we achieve now. In looking at neighboring schools, and in particular, the schools of Lower Kuskokwim School District, I do not see the improvements being made that we are achieving. If we were to be absorbed by LKSD, I am afraid we would just be "one of many" failing bush schools in their district. Now we feel the pinch very personally and are working very hard to see improvement in our students.

In your letter, you asked two specific questions. I would like to address these in closing.

1. *Given the considerable administrative and managerial duties associated with operating a public school district, at what point does the best interests of Alaska's children and the best interests of the general public compel school consolidation?*

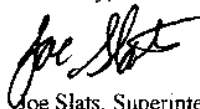
Student achievement must be the determining factor in school consolidation. If it can be demonstrated scientifically that students from larger districts perform better, this would be a valid reason for consolidation. The "best interests of the general public" would be compelling when the general public is crying for consolidation. It has been my observation so far the only ones crying for consolidation are the legislators. As one of my board members so eloquently put it, "We ought not to be stingy with our children." If we balance the state budget on the backs of our children, we will all lose.

2. *If some form of school consolidation is directed by the Alaska legislature, what options should be considered first?*

I do not believe there is a time when school consolidation should happen as the result of a directive from the State Legislature. This ought to be a decision made by the people who will be affected by the consolidation, the voters of this great state.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my opinions.

Sincerely,



Joe Slats, Superintendent

JS/cr

Cc: Roger Sampson

NOV-26-03 WED 10:03 AM DCED COMMISSIONER JNU

FAX NO. 9074655442

P. 02/03

HC  
GK  
Dan B



## CITY OF SKAGWAY

GATEWAY TO THE GOLD RUSH OF "98"  
P.O. BOX 415, SKAGWAY, ALASKA 99840  
(PHONE) (907) 983-2297  
(FAX) (907) 983-2151

RECEIVED

AK Dept. of Education  
Comm. on Education

November 20, 2003

The Honorable Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

The Honorable Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Dept. of Education  
801 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioners Hargraves and Sampson:

The City of Skagway has received your letter of November 10<sup>th</sup> requesting our input on the issue of consolidation of schools. We are very concerned about the direction that you have been given, both from the legislature as well as from LBC staff.

While we are certainly sympathetic to the desire to increase efficiencies as the state addresses the growing fiscal gap, we remain amazed that there is still the misplaced sense of a "one size fits all" solution to the problem.

Some of our largest districts in our most populated communities enjoy state support of local education of upwards of 80% of the cost of that education, while some small districts with enrollments of under 250 students have a level of state support well under 50% of the total cost of education.

It is not necessarily the case that small remote school districts enjoy the highest level of state support. Nor is it necessarily the case that consolidation of small districts will save money in the long term. And it is rarely the case that by saving money in administrative costs the quality of the educational experience of those students will improve.

This is particularly the case in Skagway. We have been the focus of the ire of Senator Wilken for quite some time. I am sure that both he and the LBC would like for our school district to be combined with Haines, at a minimum. As our superintendent is also the school principal, the cost savings would be minimal. However, the advantages to Haines would be significant in that they would have access to our substantial tax base, and would have the majority of the seats on the resulting school board. More money - No opposition... This would be a godsend to them, and the death knell for us. And, we already contribute in excess of 50% of the cost of our education, which is considerably higher than Anchorage or Haines.

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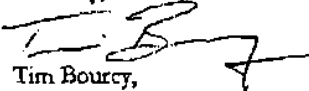
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P. 03/03

Consolidation of Schools  
November 21, 2003  
Page 2 of 2

If there are opportunities to increase the educational opportunities in areas in the state while at the same time saving money, then they should be explored. However, do not assume that what works in one area will work in all. Perhaps you should start by looking at any school district that receives more than 50% of its funding from the state, regardless of enrollment, and see how the local governments can step up to the plate. Please don't mess with those districts who are already paying the lion's share of their local education costs. This will only make their burden greater, and the education of their youth less certain.

Sincerely,

  
Tim Bourcy,  
Mayor

Cc: Governor Murkowski  
Commissioner Blatchford  
Senator Lincoln  
Representative Kookesh



*Lake and Peninsula Borough*

P.O. Box 495  
King Salmon, Alaska 99613

Telephone: (907) 246-3421  
Fax: (907) 246-6602



November 25, 2003

The Honorable Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West 7<sup>th</sup> Ave, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

The Honorable Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Dept. of Education  
801 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioners Hargraves and Sampson:

Thank you for the opportunity to address matters relating to school consolidation per the Legislative directive within the State operating budget, Sec 1, Chapter 83, SLA 2003.

You asked for a response to the question of the considerable administrative and managerial duties related to operating a school district and at what point do the best interests of Alaska's children and the best interests of the general public compel school consolidation. This is a very difficult, complicated and intricate question to answer.

I offer these thoughts from a manager's prospective:

If indeed the State of Alaska is driven in this endeavor with the principal purpose of saving money, studies suggest the consolidation of schools might save 5 to 10% of the education budget. The downside for students involved in a consolidation process is unknown. The question then is such a small savings worth the risk of negatively impacting unknown numbers of our students?

On the other hand, if the State of Alaska is driven by the organized borough vs. the unorganized borough issue, studies demonstrate a wealth of pros and cons on both sides of that issue. Making the numbers say what you want is no doubt at work here. However, the question of who will benefit from forced borough formation should be closely considered.

The sad truth is the State of Alaska has done a miserable job living up to its constitutional obligations to financially support existing school districts, municipalities and boroughs. In my opinion, few regions are likely to pursue borough formation of their own volition. There are just too few incentives for borough formation. The reality state-wide is quite the contrary. Many small communities are openly discussing dissolving their local governmental structures and turning their keys over to the State of Alaska. Those

Chignik Bay • Chignik Lagoon • Chignik Lake • Egegik • Igiugig • Kiamma • Ivanof Bay • Kokhanok • Levelock  
Newhalen • Nondalton • Pedro Bay • Perryville • Pilot Point • Pope Vannoy • Port Alsworth • Port Heiden • Ugashik

11/26/03 12:24 FAX 9072486602

Lake&Peninsula Borough


003

numbers include municipalities within organized boroughs and as well as from the unorganized borough. I am quite certain municipal disbandment was a topic during the recent AML Conference in Nome. Many small rural communities are being forced "out of business" by unceasing state budget cuts and program "changes" while more and more community needs are now met by federally funded programs developed in large part to offset the State of Alaska's funding shortfalls. What happens when the federal funding so prevalent in the State of Alaska right now, begins to dry up?

Finally, if some school consolidation is in fact mandated by our Legislature, Senator Wilken's "option number 2" would be our choice for the first option. However, it should be viewed as "the lesser of the evils" and not applicable in most situations.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



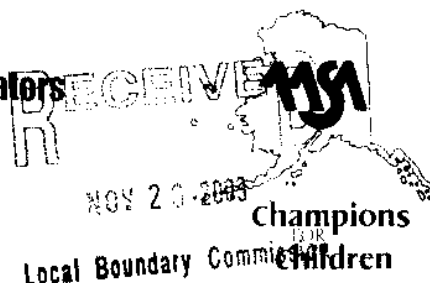
Jeff Currier  
Borough Manager

Cc: Superintendent Atwater, Lake and Peninsula School District



**Alaska Association of School Administrators**  
LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING

326 Fourth St., Suite 404 • Juneau, AK 99801-1101  
Phone: (907) 586-9702 (800) 478-9702 • Fax: (907) 586-5879



20 November 2003

Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, AK 99501

Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
801 W. 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Mr. Hargraves and Commissioner Sampson:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the matter of school consolidation, as requested in your letter of November 10, 2003. The Alaska Association of School Administrators (AASA) is vitally interested in this topic and welcomes the chance to help frame the discussion to best meet the needs of Alaska's students.

For the record, the AASA membership passed a resolution in early October 2003 opposing mandated school district consolidation. Several reasons are cited in the resolution to include, the loss or reduction of local control over educational matters, the lack of a demonstrable connection between academic performance and school consolidation, and projected minimal cost savings. AASA membership does support continuation of the many existing cooperative efforts to share services, when such efforts result in real cost savings to the districts.

Most importantly, we believe that if school district consolidation is to occur, it must enhance student achievement. Otherwise, there is little point to creating the upheaval that will likely result. However, if districts voluntarily combine (as has occurred in the past) it is assumed they will have analyzed the benefits to each, both monetarily and academically, through shared services, shared staff, economies of scale for purchasing, and the like.

You have posed two questions. First, *"Given the considerable administrative and managerial duties associated with operating a public school district, at what point does the best interest of Alaska's children and the best interest of the general public compel school consolidation?"*

In answer, consolidation of schools is a district function, not a state function. The number of schools, and their grade levels, should be determined by the school district staff who understand the local needs and where best to target the district's resources. That being said, a reconsideration of the minimum number of students required for maintaining a school in a community should be undertaken.



Consolidation of school districts, however, arguably falls to the state. There is not a single, precise point at which school district consolidation would be compelled. For example, due to geographic location, it is unlikely that the Pribilof School District will ever be more effectively administered by another district. The school district will always require an administrator and staff on-site, even though it is small. Or, consider Skagway that is also small, yet contributes nearly 50% in local contribution to their education system. Would the state wish to risk losing that contribution by combining it with another district? On the other hand, there are some districts with more than 250 students that might benefit from merging. Bottom line? No simple solutions exist for this very complex problem.

The second question is *"If some form of school consolidation is directed by the Alaska Legislature, what options should be considered first?"* It must be underscored, once again, that AASA is opposed to mandated school district consolidation. Voluntary sharing of services and staff clearly are the options to first be considered. Furthermore, any answer to this question depends upon what the Legislature's purpose is for consolidation.

If savings to the state budget is the reason for directing consolidation, and a significant savings can be realized, then combining REAA's (because they are fully funded by the state) could be considered. In particular, there are some REAA's that were newly created some years ago, even though they had been part of an existing REAA. A second fully state-funded school district is Mt. Edgecumbe High School which is a school, not a district. It shares administrative services with the Department of Administration and it could be treated the same as other boarding schools that operate within school districts.

Next is to look at districts with fewer than 100 students, considering many factors. If a city district were to be combined with its surrounding REAA, presumably the required local contribution from that city will be lost to the state. Also, any administrative cost savings will only be realized once as other costs rise (such as travel costs to take care of administrative issues that remain, though the administrator departs).

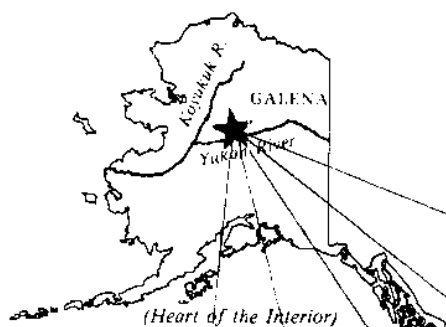
I contacted other state executives and have learned that consolidation of school districts is no panacea for student academic performance enhancement. Proponents of consolidation believe the cost-savings, however minimal, are worth the disruption of local autonomy to run schools. Opponents of consolidation believe the price is too high for the loss of local control and involvement in their schools. In any event, no one has a good grasp of the effect on student performance, whether negative or positive.

AASA appreciates the chance to assist you in this very important task.

Respectfully,



Mary A. Francis, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, AASA



## GALENA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

GALENA, ALASKA 99741  
PHONE (907) 656-1205  
FAX (907) 656-2238

SUPERINTENDENT'S  
OFFICE

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NOV 21 2003

Local Boundary Commission

November, 17, 2003

Commissioner Roger Sampson  
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
801 Tenth Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner,

I present the following in response to your request regarding consolidation views. It seems that the consolidation and potential closure of small schools comes to issue all across this great land, in all states. Under-funded schools law-suites, mandated consolidation, local control, basic educational services, student testing profiles, resulting student transportation needs, cultural differences, quality of school staff, existing and potential facilities, school and community leadership, employee benefit packages, employee housing, existing travel costs, fiscal impact (taxation/impact aid/grant funding/collective bargaining agreements), available technology, and of course student enrollment patterns. Having served through school consolidation in the Rudyard and Hingham School Districts that became the Blue Sky School District in Montana I can attest first hand to many benefits, challenges and angry feelings that can evolve from locally voted consolidation and can only imagine the unrest that comes from man-dated combinations. Diminishing student count invited several school consolidations in Montana. Economy of numbers of course provided some savings but increased travel costs often off-set those. As smaller communities lost student numbers to a point of closure, citizens generally blame school consolidation for the loss of their community being.

I don't believe there's magic in the number 250. Communities can certainly operate quality schools with economic efficiency at smaller student counts. The choice of course is in the kinds of service expectations which are generally driven by the resources present. The Galena IDEA program offers excellent services at less than half the cost of average schooling in Alaska for thirty-seven hundred students. Their state test scores much higher than average. The available resources will drive the program options and we would hope quality. The state's position should be one that quickly presents service options proven valid but within the cost range of per student amounts in the 250 student

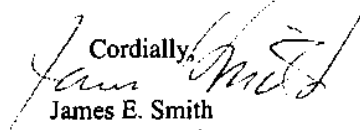
November 17, 2003

Page 2

count districts. So who decides what number are too few students? Because there is really no such number, school administrators and trustees must examine all the things noted above and those noted in Senator Wilken's communication. The individual community need, location, facilities, resources, student performance, child-count and culture should all be a part decisions regarding the future of our children. Are parents qualified to make those decisions? I say within the limits of available resources. A great many Alaska parents are making those decisions now either working with the educational services available in the area, moving, or relocating their children in schools with more extended programs. The technology is currently available to present sound instruction and learning, undoubtedly we'll be in conflict with "No Child Left Behind". There's nothing about a student count that dictates consolidation or closure but rather child welfare and academic performance.

In closing, I feel that the dollars spent on further studies or litigation, and we've seen plenty of both around the country, would be far better spent on analyzing student services toward higher performance in low performing districts. Economy of scale would probably direct us a state-wide school district like that employed in Hawaii and of course they have just as many or more problems as our local control model. Will we want to consolidate Fairbanks and Anchorage?

Cordially,



James E. Smith  
School Administrator  
Galena City School District

Cc: Darroll Hargraves

**CITY OF TANANA  
PO BOX 249  
TANANA, AK 99777  
(907) 366-7159  
FAX 366-7169**

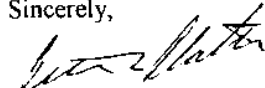
November 21, 2003

Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early  
Development  
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

Dear Commissioner Sampson:

The City of Tanana is in receipt of your letter relating to school consolidation. The timeline from receipt of the letter on November 14 does not give the city enough time to set a meeting with the school to discuss this matter and to respond by November 26. The City does intend to respond in as timely a manner as possible.

Sincerely,



Peter L. Platten  
City Manager

Cc: Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission

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NOV 21 2003

Local Boundary Commission





## TANANA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

### Maudrey J. Sommer School

P. O. Box 89  
89 River Street  
Tanana, Alaska 99777

Telephone: (907) 366-7203 or 7207

Fax: (907) 366-7201

Web Page: <http://sztanana.tanana-schoolzone.net>

RECEIVED

November 25, 2003

Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 W. 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Anchorage, AK 99501-3510

NOV 25 2003  
Local Boundary Commission

Dear Mr. Hargraves:

Your November 10 letter sent to the Honorable Donna Folger, Mayor of Tanana, arrived after our November meeting of the Tanana City School District Board of Education, and contained a deadline for submitting comments that is before the December meeting. Thus, it did not allow time for the School Board and the City Council to meet together or separately, to form a reply.

A formal reply containing the Tanana City School District's input concerning school consolidation will be sent when the TCSD Board of Education has met. In the meantime, a few matters should be brought to your attention that have been discussed by the school district's board and administration in the past. The major points that the Boundary Commission may want to consider, if matters must be discussed before the formal reply is received, are that Tanana City School District wishes to stay independent, Tanana is incorporated as a first class city (therefore already contributes to the funding of the schools), Tanana City School District's schools already run as inexpensively as possible, and Tanana's Maudrey J. Sommer School made adequate yearly progress for the school year just reported.

Tanana originally incorporated as a first class city because the residents wished to have local control of their school. That desire has not changed. As a first class city, Tanana has consistently contributed more than the minimum required local effort toward support of the school. As a community, the residents of Tanana contribute to the school in many more ways than just money. There are countless volunteer hours, donations and general support of the school and its activities. The citizens of Tanana own their school and are proud of it. Forced consolidation would take that away from them.

The expenses that keep Tanana City Schools from being able to spend 70% of their budget on instruction are fixed operating costs of the building. Providing fuel, electricity, maintenance, water and sewer to Maudrey J. Sommer School cost more than 30% of the funds available to the district. The district employs only one maintenance man and one custodian. Likewise, there is nothing left to cut from administration. TCSD employs one chief school administrator, who performs the functions of superintendent, principal, special education director and part-time teacher. The current administrator is a retiree who has signed a waiver for the TRS system; she works for less than two-thirds the average Alaskan superintendent's salary. Accounting functions are being localized, a process that will minimize those costs, reducing them to a fraction of the cost of an external accounting contract.

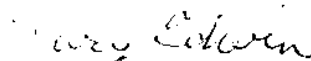
There is certainly no fat in the costs for teachers. Every teacher teaches multi-level, combined classes.

Any further reduction in number of teachers would be very harmful to the education of the students. According to information from NEA, the TCSD salary scale is in the lower half of salary scales across the state. Nor are there aide positions to cut.

In summary, TCSD has done very well, helping the Maudrey J. Sommer School students to achieve adequate yearly progress, with minimum funding. Local control and local support have made that possible. (The failure of the district as a whole to make adequate yearly progress lies in the fact that it was not possible to test enough of the students in the district's statewide correspondence program.) Consolidation would actually cost more, since some of the cost-cutting measures currently in place would not be available to a consolidated system. Local contribution would not be likely to increase. It is more likely that it would decrease to the minimum required, since local incentive to contribute more would not longer be felt by the residents of Tanana.

Until a full reply can be drafted by the TCSD Board of Education and the Tanana City Council, please consider the points presented.

Sincerely,



Mary Edwin  
Chief School Administrator

# SKAGWAY CITY SCHOOL

P.O. Box 497

• Skagway, Alaska 99840 •

(907) 983-2960

RECEIVED

DEC 02 2003

November 21, 2003

**Local Boundary Commission**

The Honorable Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Department of Education  
801 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1894

The Honorable Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

Re: Response to School District Consolidation Letter

Dear Commissioners Sampson and Hargraves,

I am in receipt of your letter dated November 10, 2003 concerning the issue of school district consolidation in Alaska, specifically in districts with fewer than 250 students. I am very grateful that you are giving me an opportunity to respond to this question as it might have dire consequences for the students in our school district and for the citizens of the city of Skagway. Thank you so much for soliciting a response from me to your letter.

Let me first state that I am very cognizant of the serious fiscal constraints that Governor Murkowski and our Alaska State Legislature are having to grapple with during our present national and state economic recessions. I applaud their efforts in seeking creative avenues to help to alleviate some of the costs adversely impacting our state's budget. And I will support those decisions made by Governor Frank Murkowski and the Alaska State Legislature to improve the economic and financial outlook for the State of Alaska. I am glad that both the Local Boundary Commission and the Alaska Department of Education and Early Childhood Development are examining a wide variety of options for saving our state desperately needed revenues that are vital to balance the state's budget.

In a state as large and diverse as Alaska it seems that the complicated and arduous task of analyzing the possible outcomes of school district consolidation must be done on a school district by school district basis. Probably each school district in our great state present uniquely "Alaskan" issues and situations that would impact your recommendations. That makes this task for the LBC and the DEED exceedingly difficult as you begin a rigorous analysis of this issue. I truly hope that my letter to you might give you a greater understanding of the inimitable distinctions found in the Skagway City School District.



In the case of the Skagway City School District we, indeed, are a very small, rural district situated approximately 100 miles north of Juneau. As you may know, we are the northern terminus of the Alaska Marine Highway and are connected through the road system by 800 miles of highway to Anchorage. Our district consists of approximately 118 students in grades PreK-12 in one building. Our school building was built in 1985. We have thirteen certified teachers, one special education paraprofessional, two office personnel, one cook, two maintenance workers, and one custodian. I am the only administrator in the school district and I act as the superintendent, principal, Director of Special Education, Personnel Director, Director of Federal and State Programs, and the grant's writer. Our School Board has five members and its president is Mrs. Chris Ellis.

Our district has been adversely affected by Sec. 14.17.600 of Alaska School Laws and Regulations Annotated which arbitrarily sets the 20 day student count date as the fourth Friday in October. We are possibly unique in Alaska since 20% or more of our school students while here when school starts in August will eventually leave at the end of the tourist season near the end of September. They return in March so their parents can prepare for the next tourist season. These families are actual residents of Skagway and many own homes here, but we are never able to include their children in our student count because they are not here in October. Our district has lost over 1 million dollars in revenue over the years because of this situation. We must and want to provide teachers, textbooks, school equipment, and ancillary resources for these students in August, September, March, April, and May and summer school in June and July, but we never get compensated by the state for part of these expenditures because of the current student count procedure. And our students are not enrolling and going to school in other districts in Alaska where they, at least, could be considered in the student state enrollment, but are going to various locations throughout the United States and the world and in some cases are home schooled as they travel visiting family and friends.

Even with this loss in pupil count to our district we are still not going to be a district with more than 250 students for the near future. Mr. Mike Catsi, Executive Director of the Skagway Development Corporation, and I have been in meetings discussing possible endeavors that we could sponsor to expand the economic base of our community and bring more families to live and go to school in Skagway. One proposal that we would like to be considered for by the Department of Education & Early Childhood Development is establishing a Regional Learning Center in Skagway. We feel that we have an excellent location and infrastructure to support an additional location for secondary education. We might even be considered as a magnet, charter school for students in a specialized area like computer technology, environmental sciences, fish hatchery, or the tourist industry. Or a boarding school for students coming from locations in the United States and the world might be a very viable economic enterprise for our school district and city. I am independently seeking grant funds both from government agencies and philanthropical, endowed foundations to pursue this educational concept.

I believe that the Skagway City School District has tried to find ways to economize the costs of doing business in our school while maximizing educational opportunities for our students. We have proactively found ways to save money on our electrical and heating

bills while working in an almost 20 year building. As we have sought positive means to economize costs to our school district without adversely affecting the education of our children, we are increasingly having to find creative methods with which to replace a leaking, below ground diesel tank, replace a five hundred gallon water heater, drain and replace the glycol heating our building, trying to update our computer technology, purchase a school van, and provide a student food service program among other needs.

Besides the very important issue of keeping school districts accountable to local control as mentioned in your letter there should be very compelling reasons to consolidate school districts since it ultimately disenfranchises parents and families in local communities if the school district office is located geographically distant from the local school.

I have carefully reviewed the two questions posed in your letter and am unable to find substantial savings in doing business as a consolidated school district that would economically benefit the Skagway City School District. Question 1 in your letter implies that it might be in the interest of the general public to consolidate schools subsuming that costs for administrating the district might be lowered. In the case of the Skagway City School District our distance from either Juneau or Haines, our two closest neighbors, would not make it feasible to eliminate administrative, office, staff, or teaching personnel from our current employee configuration so I am unclear as to how a consolidation in Skagway, in particular, would benefit the citizens of our great state.

Question 2 in your letter suggests that if some sort of a school district consolidation is mandated by the Alaska State Legislature and approved by our Governor what options should be considered? Because Alaska is such an “unusual” state given its immense geographical boundaries and its sparse population centers I believe that it would be imperative to consider school district consolidation on a district by district basis. The children, communities, and cultures found throughout our state require analytical reviews that individually respects their needs and inculcates their goals and aspirations for the children in their villages, towns and cities. You have been charged with a formidable task.

I am very proud of the accomplishments of the students in the Skagway City School District. Our students have among the highest scores in the state in both state and national standardized tests. We have a city who consistently offers financial assistance to the maximum amount permitted by law. This year the City of Skagway is funding the school around \$97,000 as its share of participation for a school building roof repair construction project which was approved by voters in our state last November as referendum Proposition C. The state will provide the additional funding.

If the primary reason that school district consolidation might be considered by our legislature is for financial savings to the state, Skagway has a very unique proposition for the Local Boundary Commission. Please approve the City of Skagway’s request to be made a Borough in Alaska. I know that Skagway wants to be a borough. The City wants to financially accept its fair share by contributing money to our state coffers to pay for state services and the costs of governing our state. Skagway wants to solve this problem!

Skagway is one of the few cities in the state that I am aware of that wants to accept a further financial burden by becoming a borough. Skagway seems to precisely define a place where local accountability and fiscal responsibility are deemed important. The Skagway City School District has issued Resolution 03-06 which I have enclosed in support of this endeavor. Our citizens want to assume their fair share for the governance of a borough and are on record of stating that the \$600,000 start-up costs provided by the state for borough formation is not needed by the City of Skagway to form its borough! That is a remarkable offer to our state in these dire financial circumstances.

I understand the concept of saving money for our state. I am unaware of statistical data which proves that school district consolidation saves money. It has not been very successful in North Carolina. I know that attempting to consolidate the Skagway City School District with either Juneau or Haines will not amount in any substantial savings. I am sure that consolidating our district with a neighboring school district will adversely impact the local autonomy of our parents in managing our district. I know that our students are already achieving at the highest levels in our state for every educational statistical measure used in Alaska to indicate success. I know that the City of Skagway wants to become a Borough and would then assume a greater responsibility and fiscal accountability for our Skagway City School District. We want to help solve this problem!

Please let me know if I may in any capacity be of assistance to either LBC or DEED or both of your agencies in contemplating and formulating recommendations to the Alaska State Legislature and Governor Murkowski. I urge you to consider being extremely creative and thinking "outside the box" by recommending that the City of Skagway become the Skagway Borough which would help the State of Alaska in our current budget crisis and also remove the fiscal concern about school district consolidation for the Skagway City School District! Skagway wants to be a positive part of the solution!

Please know that I admire your efforts, hard work, and dedication in trying to formulate recommendations about school district consolidation to our legislature and governor. The process that you are involved in epitomizes our democratic ideals and the benefits we all have by living in our great nation and sharing its freedoms. Again, if I may in anyway be of assistance, please feel free to contact me. Have a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday celebrating with your family and friends.

Sincerely,



Dr. Michael Gregory Dickens  
Superintendent

Enclosure of Resolution #03-06 supporting Skagway Borough formation

Cc: School Board, City Mayor, City Council, City Manager

# **SKAGWAY CITY SCHOOL**

P.O. Box 497 • Skagway, Alaska 99840 • (907) 983-2960

## **Resolution #03-06**


Whereas, Governor Frank Murkowski has challenged the cities of Alaska to accept their fair share of the financial burden to pay for the cost of government in our great state during these times of needed fiscal constraint.

Whereas, Governor Frank Murkowski has repeatedly stated that he is in favor of "local control" for the citizens living in rural areas throughout the state of Alaska.

Whereas, the City of Skagway has petitioned the Borough Commission to be given permission to form a borough of the sites of Skagway and Dyea so it can accept its full financial responsibility to operate a borough for its residents and because the citizens of Skagway and Dyea wish to exert their "local control" in this matter to become a borough.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Skagway City School District supports the efforts of the City of Skagway for the formation of the Skagway Borough through its petition of the Borough Commission and sponsors any necessary amendments in current law as enacted by the legislature to enable the creation of such stated political entity during the current session of the Alaskan legislature under statute law.

Adopted the 8<sup>th</sup> of April, 2003.



Chris Ellis, President  
Skagway City School Board



November 26, 2003

RECEIVED  
DEC 02 2003  
Local Boundary Commission

Mr. Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 West Seventh Avenue, Ste. 1770  
Anchorage, AK 99501-3510

Dear Mr. Hargraves:

Thank you for the invitation to respond to questions regarding school consolidation.

The interests of the public are best accommodated when we consider the best interests of the children. In the long run, educational expenditures are the single best investment we can make in the future of the State. The legislature seems to believe that the public is best served by controlling the dollars spent on education. There seems to be a feeling that consolidation will produce cost savings to the State. I doubt that this is true. Inasmuch as the foundation formula pays primarily on a per-student basis, funding to districts will be much the same, absent considerations of boroughization as a means of providing local contribution in what are now REAA's. There could be some small cost savings to the state if a consolidated district decided to combine schools and reduce the number of sites funded, but I don't believe that this would occur in very many cases. Particularly in the lower grades, most studies show that children are better served when attending schools close to home. I believe that I can safely say a vast majority of the parents on Prince of Wales Island prefer to have their children attend schools in their home communities. Closing a school which is eligible for funding as a separate site is a decision not easily reached, and should be made at the local level. The small savings realized by reducing site funding come at great expense to our children, and the State should not even consider overriding local control of this issue.

The only financial benefit of consolidation *might* come from elimination of the redundancies in central administration where several small districts in geographical proximity now maintain complete administrative staffs. In such cases the elimination of several major salaries could make more money available for programs and teachers.

It may be in some instances that educational programs can be expanded and enriched in schools with higher enrollments, but this issue is largely offset by the proliferation of technology-enhanced delivery of academic programs. Vocational courses, and classes which

depend upon personal performance (such as music, debate, drama, etc.) may not receive the same benefits of technology, and it is possible that larger schools could benefit students who wish to enroll in these courses. However, the State has already declared that parents may enroll their children outside their home district, so forced consolidation does not largely increase opportunities for children.

In any case, I do not believe that the State should even attempt to force consolidation of individual schools. If there is to be consolidation, it should be by redefining district boundaries, and then leaving the decisions of how best to accommodate the children up to the local school board. On Prince of Wales Island, and in other parts of the State, there is a strong fear that the consolidation issue will lead to the closing of local community schools. This should not be so. No child, and no parent, should have to fear the loss of a local school which is addressing the educational needs of the child. If enrollment falls below the level for site funding, then the local school board should make the decision whether to close a school which has lost site funding.

In summary, I believe that the best interests of our children should be the only compelling argument for or against consolidation. I can see only a few small benefits in educational programs, and only in the upper grades. Local control is a compelling governance issue, and the State should not impose any consolidation legislation or regulation which dilutes local control. Cost savings to the State and to local districts would be minimal at best.

For years local districts have been attempting to plan for State-mandated boroughs and changes in district boundaries. If the State is going to make substantive changes to school district boundaries, or is going to impose mandatory boroughization, let's get it done, so that local districts can focus their efforts on making the best of the situation, rather than trying to continually provide for multiple alternatives. The uncertainty has cost us more planning time than would definitive legislation.

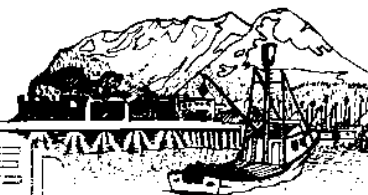
Sincerely,



Carl "Doc" Waterman  
Craig City School District  
School Board President



# CITY OF CORDOVA



December 8, 2003

RECEIVED

DEC 27 2003

Darroll Hargraves, Chair  
Local Boundary Commission  
550 W. 7th Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3510

Local Boundary Commission

Dear Mr. Hargraves:

The issue of determining standards or criteria for consolidation of schools may be of such complexity as to require the advice of a financial advisor or social economist. What is the economy of scale for rural Alaskan school districts? We have never researched the matter. Although I think there must be some unbiased research out there.

Our local School District's opinion is based off of the position of the Associations of Alaska School Boards. They are fearful that forming a borough means losing local control for the current school boards. The concept of what is "local" in educational local control is nebulous. A borough is local control, albeit different than what we have now. They do not posit whether there are any benefits to creating a borough.

The City of Cordova is less worried about sharing power to a regional organization than it is in finding a broader revenue base to provide a standard of service to its citizens. A broad base is inherently stable and diverse. Each community that would make up the Prince William Sound Borough could bring their individual strengths to form a broad base and diversified economy. Our lifestyles and needs are recognized and tied to the characteristics of life in Prince William Sound.

Given the current poor economy in Cordova and the State's direction to continually divest responsibility for services or the funding for locally provided state services, consolidation or regionalization of some services seem inevitable. Consolidation is a natural process when a system needs to become more efficient and strong. The dictionary well defines consolidation.

The only guidance we can give you is that consolidation might best occur when the local school reaches a point it cannot afford to provide a certain standard of education. That requires a results based test.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott A. Hahn".

Scott A. Hahn  
City Manager







## SOUTHEAST ISLAND SCHOOL DISTRICT

P.O. Box 19569, 1218A Shoreline Drive Thorne Bay, Alaska 99919  
(907) 828-8254 Fax: (907) 828-8257 E-mail: [jjisom@sisd.org](mailto:jjisom@sisd.org)

January 16, 2004

Local Boundary Commission  
550 West Seventh Avenue, Suite 1770  
Anchorage, Alaska 99501-3510  
Fax: (907) 269-4539

RECEIVED

JAN 22 2004

Local Boundary Commission

Dear Sirs,

We are happy to respond to your letter of November 10<sup>th</sup>. We are pleased to have been offered the chance to share with you our thoughts about all forms of school amalgamation plans.

Firstly, we object strenuously to the states continuing effort to correct state budget problems at the expense of our children. The children are already under-financed. We think the state should consider having a 70-30 budgeting rule just as the school systems do, with equally stringent parameters for determining whether or not a particular dollar 'counts' as serving the children.

Secondly, if you choose to amalgamate school districts you should be prepared to spend money to fund the social growth efforts that will be needed to empower the various cultures on Prince of Wales Island to work together in harmony for our children. We remember that the hatreds on the Island were caused and are perpetuated by governments and big businesses; the very agencies which want to solve their fiscal problems by increasing our fiscal *and social* problems.

Thirdly, we are very nervous and suspicious about the too large school that was built in the largest city of the dominant culture on Prince of Wales Island. It was built twice the size that was needed; we wonder why we should play dumb; we do intuit the plan of bussing all high school kids on the island to that half-empty school.

Fourthly, we are strongly supportive of our community schools. Data shows that kids do better academically and socially in smaller schools, *when they are appropriately funded*. Communities are healthier, more viable when they have a local school; more vibrant when they can participate in the governance of their school, more centered when they have a school in which to gather. Having a local school, locally governed, is supportive of local cultural identity. We fear that erasing local cultural identity is an intrinsic objective of school amalgamation on Prince of Wales Island.

Finally, we would like to suggest some important goals for the Local Boundary Commission and the Legislature:

- Be certain that whatever plan you choose to implement actually does institute 'economies of scale' *while appropriately funding our children's education.*
- Be certain that the amalgamation plan you choose doesn't undo our fruitful work to increase the quality of our children's educational programs.
- Be certain that your actions support the social evolution that has begun to occur between the cultures on the Island. This important continuing social evolution will:
  - Enrich the lives of our children,
  - Improve the quality of school programs,
  - Increase harmony among the cultures of the Island,
  - Support the development of local economies.

In closing, we wish to thank you again. We are pleased that you sought our input. We acknowledge and appreciate the individuals serving on the Commission and in the Legislature who are sincere in serving the people *and the children.* We are willing and anxious to help you determine what is truly best for our children.

Sincerely,

The Southeast Island School District

**CITY OF TANANA  
PO BOX 249  
TANANA, AK 99777  
(907)- 366-7159  
FAX 366-7169**

January 16, 2004

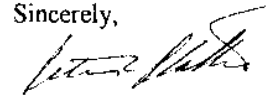
Roger Sampson  
Commissioner  
Department of Education and Early Development  
801 West Tenth Street, Suite 200  
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1194

Dear Commissioner Sampson:

Regarding the DOE/Local Boundary Commission request for comment on school consolidation the following is submitted.

Tanana became a First Class City because the residents wished to have local control of their school. Forced consolidation would take away the local control that is so important to the residents. At the same time it is debatable whether consolidation would either save money or improve the quality of education in Tanana. Until such time as it is demonstrated these two goals are feasible, Tanana would oppose forced consolidation.

Sincerely,



Peter L. Platten  
City Manager

Cc: Darroll Hargraves  
Chair  
Local Boundary Commission

RECEIVED  
JAN 20 2004  
Local Boundary Commission